

SYRIA

Dana City Labour Market Assessment: Microenterprises

January 2025



BASMEH & ZEITONEH
RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT



**Early Recovery and
Livelihoods Cluster**
North-west Syria (NWS)

REACH

Informing
more effective
humanitarian action

Cover: A female entrepreneur working on a tailoring machine in Dana City, Idleb Governorate, Syria, by Basmeh & Zeitooneh, January 2025.

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, Acted, and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT). For more information, please visit [our website](#). You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on X @REACH_info.

About Basmeh & Zeitooneh

Basmeh & Zeitooneh (B&Z) is a grassroots organization established in 2014 when a group of volunteers in Lebanon – driven by the plight of Syrian refugees – began a small relief operation. Today, B&Z has grown into one of the largest and most established refugee-led relief organizations, responding to the acute needs of both the displaced and their host communities. We're proud to be founded by refugees, for refugees. B&Z provides education, protection, food security and livelihoods, peacebuilding, relief and emergency efforts, advocacy and WASH services. We serve host, refugee, and displaced populations in Lebanon, Syria, and Türkiye, through community centers run by members of the communities themselves.

About the Early Recovery and Livelihoods Cluster (North-West Syria)

The Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ERL) Cluster for North-West Syria (NWS) aims at increasing access to livelihoods and job opportunities for people, improving equitable access to basic services, and strengthening social cohesion within communities. The ERL cluster is a humanitarian cluster hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the inter-cluster coordination system for cross border operations, ensuring the coordination of response interventions of 90 partner organizations.

Summary

The fall of the Assad government¹ in Damascus on the 8th of December 2024 marks the most significant shift in the country's political landscape since the onset of the civil war in 2011. Fourteen years into the conflict, the Syria crisis is complex and multi-dimensional, characterized by political instability, armed conflict, repeated displacement, and economic deterioration. Syria faces economic stagnation, underdevelopment, continuously deteriorating infrastructure, inadequate basic services, unstable markets, and lack of access to livelihoods. These changes create both challenges and opportunities for humanitarian efforts. In a country-wide Joint Needs Assessment² conducted by REACH in December 2024 and January 2025, Key Informants (KIs) in 82% of surveyed communities reported that challenges in securing enough income included that income does not cover living expenses; the next-most-common challenges were lack of employment opportunities (64%), then low demand for workers (56%)³.

According to the Northwest Syria Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ERL) Cluster's 4Ws data⁴, Dana City (population: 71,175⁵) had the highest number of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) interventions in Idleb Governorate in 2024 and is the urban centre for surrounding districts. However, there is a lack of systematic, publicly available, and up-to-date information on employment status, core and growing sectors in Dana City, and labour market supply and demand.

With strategic guidance from the ERL Cluster, the Dana Labour Market Assessment for Microenterprises assessment was carried out by REACH, in partnership with Basmeh & Zeitooneh, a grassroots organization that provides services in various sectors, and through its 12 community centers offers comprehensive support for displaced persons, refugees, and host communities in Syria, Lebanon, and Türkiye. This collaboration was essential for ensuring gender balance in the sampling and data collection process and for integrating gender-specific questions into the research tools. Key Informants (KIs) from governmental bodies, NGOs, and market experts contributed valuable insights to shape the assessment's design.

Data collection was done using a mixed-methods approach of purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was done through creating a form that collected the contact information of male and female Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) representatives across the key employment sectors in Dana City, then sharing the form with REACH's partners and KIs to distribute across their professional networks. The collected contact information was used to plan enumerators' data collection efforts. After that, snowball sampling was applied to continue data collection until the target number of surveys was completed.

From 14-16 January 2025, 36 male and female REACH enumerators interviewed representatives of 216 MSMEs in Dana City, using two structured data collection tools: one for microenterprises and one for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)⁶. Eight interviews were removed during data cleaning, resulting in 208 interviews valid for data analysis: 84 with microenterprises, 82 with small enterprises, and 42 with medium enterprises.

¹ OCHA, [Whole of Syria Flash Update No. 4 - Recent Developments in Syria \(As of 10 December 2024\)](#), 10 December 2024.

² REACH, [Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria \(HSOS\) – Joint Needs Assessment Dashboard 2024-2025](#), 23 January 2025.

³ REACH, [Unpacking the effects of thirteen years of crisis: A snapshot of humanitarian needs in post-Assad Syria](#), January 2025.

⁴ The 4Ws (Who does What, Where, and When) is an information management process led by OCHA. Every month, partner organizations are asked to report on the 4Ws. Publicly available data is accessible [here](#).

⁵ OCHA, Population Task Force Population Data. June 2024 (unpublished).

⁶ The findings related to SMEs are published as a separate report and [dashboard](#).

This report focuses on the microenterprises in Dana City, while another report focuses on the SMEs.

Key findings

The following key findings underscore the need for targeted support and capacity-building initiatives to enhance the viability and resilience of microenterprises, especially for female-established enterprises.

Within the data sample, **most entrepreneurs were in their 30s or 40s, were married (88%), and the enterprise was their only source of income (89%)**. Most interviewed entrepreneurs (62%) were the heads of their households, while 30% were the spouse of the head of household. The highest educational qualification for most interviewed entrepreneurs (60%) was a school degree (1st to 12th grade), while 19% had a bachelor's degree (four years' study). A minority of interviewed entrepreneurs (10%) did not participate in a formal education system but can read and write.

Most interviewed entrepreneurs (76%) had previous work experience in the same sector prior to establishing the microenterprise, while 24% did not have any prior work experience or had experience in a different sector. Most (82%) did not receive any type of training related to their enterprise's activities prior to establishing the microenterprise. For most interviewed entrepreneurs (73%), one of their **main motivations for establishing the microenterprise was the lack of job opportunities** in the market and not being able to secure a job.

Per the scoping interviews, the main sectors in which microenterprises operate in Dana City are agribusiness, commercial retail and trade, construction, engineering, and contracting, food production, light industry and manufacturing (non-food items), private health, services and maintenance. While the overall number of staff working for interviewed microenterprises (2-3 staff) was consistent between enterprises established by male and female entrepreneurs, **female-established enterprises tended to include two female and one male staff, while male-established enterprisers tended not to include female staff at all**.

Around two-thirds (**65%**) of enterprises reported that they are not registered with the relevant governmental bodies. **75% reported the enterprise is financially feasible** and they were able to recapture the capital they invested and started to make profit afterwards. **The most stated means of marketing services and/or products** include using their personal network of family and friends, their online shop on media channels, the physical shop at the market and/or seasonal bazaars, and their professional network of other business owners and traders.

The top challenges entrepreneurs faced in establishing and running a microenterprise were a lack of access to financial resources, financial barriers and unexpected operation costs, and high competition in the sector. There did not appear to be a strong correlation between registration status and access to finance or loans: 56% of enterprises that reported that they were not registered also reported that accessing finance or loans was a challenge, and 66% of registered enterprises reported the same. **Female entrepreneurs faced additional challenges related to gender stereotypes**. Widows faced barriers relating to societal expectations as it is not accepted in some conservative societies for women to work in activities where they have to interact with men, limiting their mobility and making it difficult for them to secure essential materials without male support. Additionally, some women experienced exploitation by suppliers who raised prices unfairly. Security concerns, such as fear of thefts, are further added to the difficulties faced female entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs reported the following needs to continue operating the microenterprise successfully: access to finance and loans, access to assets (tools, equipment, machines), financial support, and increasing their geographical reach.

There was considerable divergence regarding the impact of the fall of the Assad government: 39% reported no impact on their microenterprise; **41% reported being impacted negatively, mainly due to the decrease in demand and increase in cost of supplies**; and 20% reported positive impacts, mainly due to increased demand for their products and/or services. Despite these changes, **73% of entrepreneurs planned to stay in Dana City** for the remainder of 2025.

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List of Acronyms

IDPs:	Internally Displaced Persons
NWS:	Northwest Syria
ERL Cluster:	Early Recovery and Livelihoods Cluster
TVET:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
MSMEs:	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
HSOS:	Humanitarian Situation Overview of Syria
4Ws:	Who does What, Where, and When

Geographical Classifications

This assessment took place in Dana City and Sarmada City, Idleb Governorate, Northwest Syria.

ADMIN 1	IDLEB GOVERNORATE
ADMIN 2	DANA DISTRICT
ADMIN 3	DANA SUB-DISTRICT
ADMIN 4	DANA CITY, SARMADA CITY

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Key definitions

Key Employment Sector⁷ or key sectors of the economy represent areas of the economy in which groups of businesses share the same or related business activity, product, or service. These sectors represent a large grouping of companies with similar business activities and provide livelihood opportunities for the workforce. These sectors may include agriculture, manufacturing, construction, finance and related services, retail and commerce, etc.

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs): For this assessment, only the number of employees is used to define MSMEs. The employee thresholds have been revised down from international standards to better account for the Syrian context.⁸

Table 1: Categorization of enterprise size

Enterprise Size	Number of employees
Microenterprise	1-3 employees
Small Enterprise	4-10 employees
Medium Enterprise	11-50 employees

Sector-specific skills: Sector-specific skills are technical, job-specific abilities and special attributes that are needed for performing an occupation in practice. Learners often acquire these through post-basic education, including highly specialized professional training or extra-school courses. These skills could relate to a specific job, task, or academic discipline (e.g. teacher, geographer, medical doctor or journalist).

Vocational skills: For this assessment, the [ILO’s definition of vocational skills](#) is used: The knowledge, practical competencies, know-how, and attitudes necessary to perform certain trades or occupations in the labour market which relate to fulfilling the requirements of daily basic needs of maintaining habitation. These include carpentry, plumbing, electrical and wireworks, tin-smithing, etc.

Permanent employee: Someone who is expected to work for the business on a regular basis without a specific end date in mind. This includes full-time and part-time workers.

Temporary or seasonal employee: Someone who works for the business during a specific window of time, usually between one to six months. This includes full-time and part-time workers.

Casual or daily worker: Someone who is hired for a short period, usually between one day or up to one month. The need for daily workers may be regular or irregular.

⁷ World Bank, [Sector Taxonomy and definitions](#), July 2016.

⁸ The International Financial Corporation categorizes MSMEs based on three attributes: the number of employees, total assets, and annual sales. The limited data on enterprises and the lack of a central repository of registered business makes it challenging to estimate the total assets and annual sales.

INTRODUCTION

Thirteen years into the conflict in Syria, the crisis is complex and multi-dimensional, characterized by political instability, armed conflict, and economic deterioration, resulting in unstable markets and lack of access to livelihoods⁹. According to the [REACH Humanitarian Situation Overviews \(HSOS\) Sectoral Dashboard](#), livelihoods have consistently been reported as one of the top priority needs among all population groups in Northern Syria. In order to provide support to conflict-affected populations in accessing livelihood opportunities, finding decent employment, and becoming economically resilient and self-reliant, a deep understanding is needed of the MSMEs profiles, key employment sectors, skills of demand, and the challenges that face MSMEs.

Livelihoods programming is a core pillar of the NWS ERL Cluster's work. According to the NWS ERL Cluster's records, more Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programming was done in Dana City in 2024 than in any other location in Idleb Governorate. However, there is a lack of systematic, publicly available, and up-to-date information on employment status, core and growing sectors in Dana City, and labour market supply and demand.

Dana City (population: 71,175)¹⁰ is an urban centre for Northwest Syria and surrounding communities, including Bab El Hawa (which is a border crossing between Northwest Syria and Türkiye, and has an industrial zone) and Sarmada (an industrial and trade urban area). In March 2022, REACH published a Labour Market Assessment of Dana City¹¹ (data collection occurred during the first three weeks of December 2021). The assessment identified the gaps in employment opportunities between the supply (jobseekers) and demand (employers) by highlighting the barriers faced by jobseekers in accessing employment, the challenges faced by employers in hiring skilled labour, and the impact of COVID.

Consequently, REACH conducted the Dana Labour Market Assessment for Microenterprises with strategic support from the ERL Cluster and in partnership with Basmeh & Zeitooneh, a grassroots organization that provides services in various sectors, and through its 12 community centers offers comprehensive support for displaced persons, refugees, and host communities in Syria, Lebanon, and Türkiye. This partnership was critical for maintaining gender balance in sampling and data collecting, as well as for including gender-specific questions into research instruments. The design of the data collection tools was shaped by the insightful contributions of the KIs who represented governmental entities, NGOs, and market experts. The assessment was generously funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

The assessment aims to answer the following six research questions:

1. What are the key characteristics of entrepreneurs in Dana City? What factors drive entrepreneurs to establish microenterprises?
2. What challenges do business owners face when establishing and operating microenterprises? Do female entrepreneurs face additional challenges?
3. In what sectors and activities do microenterprises operate in Dana City? What marketing approaches do microenterprises utilize to expand their geographical reach?

⁹ REACH, [Economic Deprivation in Northwest Syria](#), April 2024.

¹⁰ OCHA, Population Task Force Population Data. June 2024 (unpublished).

¹¹ REACH, [Dana Labour Market Assessment](#), March 2022.

4. Are microenterprises in Dana City financially feasible? And what are their legal statuses?
5. What do micro-enterprise entrepreneurs need in order to continue and improve in the mid-term future in terms of capacity building, financial, and in-kind support?
6. What effects, if any, have the recent political changes in Syria and the regional conflict in Gaza and Lebanon had on MSMEs in terms of production, operation, costs, supply, demand, profits, and sustainability?

The Dana Labour Market Assessment aims to enhance implementing partners' understanding of the opportunities for growth in the key employment sectors in and around Dana City, highlighting the different gender-related factors that affect female microenterprises' owners and women's economic participation in the labour force. Also, the assessment aims to provide partners with a template that they can use to conduct similar labour market research and inform programming in other contexts.

The report covers four main parts: a profile of entrepreneurs, a profile of enterprises, impacts of the fall of the Assad government, and the gender-specific challenges.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this assessment occurred in three phases. First, REACH conducted secondary data analysis and literature review to identify key information gaps and synthesize the most notable research on the current state of the labour market in Dana City.

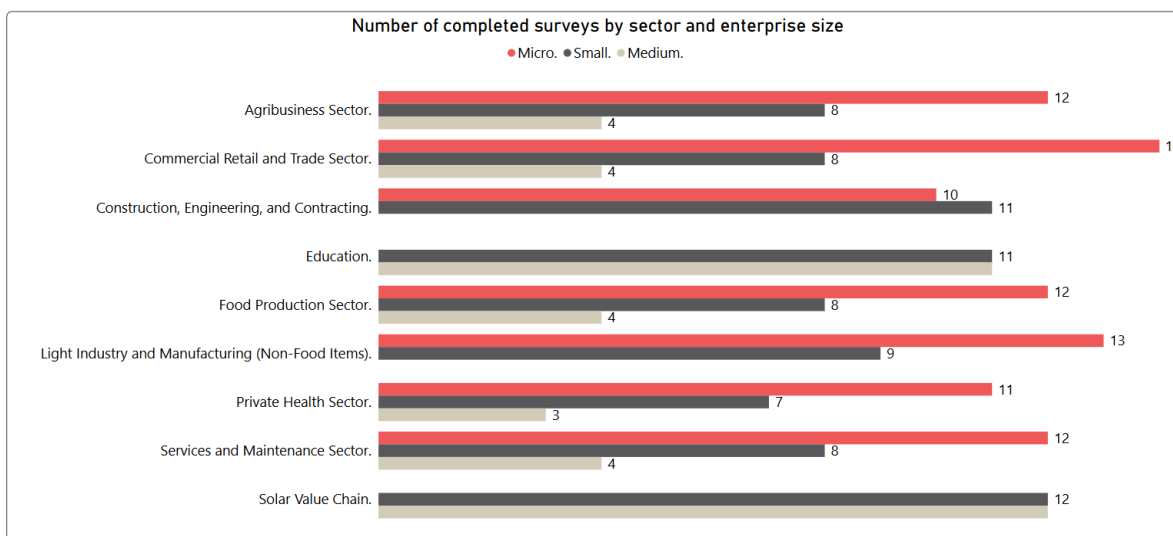
Then, REACH conducted six semi-structured scoping interviews with KIs (representatives of governmental bodies, local and international NGO staff, and market experts) to determine the geographical scope of the assessment, the top economic sectors, and the appropriate distribution of interviews between sectors and enterprise sizes. The KIs explained that the labour market in Dana City and surrounding urban areas primarily consists of micro and small enterprises, many of which are home-based businesses run by women. Therefore, there is no official record of the number of enterprises and the size of each enterprise per sector. To ensure the assessment's findings and insights are gender sensitive, REACH partnered with [Basmeh & Zeitooneh](#), a grassroots organization that provides services in various sectors, and through its 12 community centers offers comprehensive support for displaced persons, refugees, and host communities in Syria, Lebanon, and Türkiye.

REACH sought an even gender balance between interviews with male and female representatives of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The [Basmeh & Zeitooneh](#) Gender and Protection team contributed to designing the data collection tool for small enterprises by formulating gender-related questions and indicators, then analyzing them to ensure that recommendations are based on an accurate understanding of women's conditions and realities in the labor market in the region.

Findings from this assessment are indicative and specific to the areas surveyed. Further, although the sampling took into account the data collected from the scoping interviews, it should not be seen as representative of the relative size of the top economic sectors in Dana City.

The tools used for this assessment are available to partners to enable them to conduct livelihoods research in other locations. To access the tool, please contact the Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ERL) Cluster of Northwest Syria at: info.ercluster@undp.org.

Figure 1: Number of completed surveys by sector and enterprise size



Because the education sector and solar value chain sector require more staff to operate, no microenterprises were identified in those sectors.

Geographical scope

Dana City was chosen as the primary location for the Labour Market Assessment, because it had the highest number of TVET interventions in Idleb Governorate in 2024 according to the ERL Cluster 4W data and is the urban centre for surrounding districts.

Scoping interviews indicated that major economic activities are present in three areas in Dana City:¹²

- Dana Town (population: 71,175) is the main urban centre of Dana City. As of June 2024, 39% of the population were IDPs.
- Bab El Hawa Town (population: 105,283) is one of the border crossings between Syria and Türkiye. It also has an industrial zone of different types of manufacturing activities. Therefore, it is considered the industrial and trade hub of Idleb Governorate. As of June 2024, 99% of the population were IDPs.
- Sarmada Town (population: 145,616) is the secondary urban centre of Dana City. The population density of Sarmada has increased recently due to arrivals of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). As of June 2024, 85% of the population were IDPs.

Sampling strategy

84 male and female entrepreneurs working in seven different sectors and covering 31 unique activities were interviewed as follows:

¹² Population estimates are from the Population Task Force (PTF) led by OCHA, updated in June 2024 (unpublished).

Table 2: Number of completed surveys by gender

Sector	Surveys with male entrepreneurs	Surveys with female entrepreneurs	Total number of surveys
Agribusiness	3	9	12
Commercial Retail and Trade	6	8	14
Construction, Engineering, and Contracting ¹³	10	0	10
Food Production	4	8	12
Light Industry and Manufacturing (Non-Food Items) ⁵	13	0	13
Private Health	3	8	11
Services and Maintenance	4	8	12
Total number of surveys	43	41	84

The most common activities interviewed female entrepreneurs were engaged in were livestock farming (8), pharmacy (6), and hairstyling (5).

The most common activities interviewed male entrepreneurs were engaged in were contracting (5), blacksmithing (4), and production of aluminum doors and windows (4).

Data collection methods

Due to micro and small enterprises mostly being home-based businesses and not officially registered with the relevant governmental entities, such as the Chamber of Commerce, there is no official record of the number of enterprises and size of each enterprise per sector. Therefore, data collection was done through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling.

Purposive sampling was done through creating a form that collects the contact information of male and female MSMEs representatives across the key employment sectors in Dana City. The form was then shared with REACH's partners and KIs to distribute across their networks. The collected contact information was used to plan enumerators' data collection efforts.

After that, snowball sampling was applied until the target number of surveys was completed.

From 14-16 January 2025, 36 male and female REACH enumerators interviewed representatives of 216 MSMEs in Dana City, using two structured data collection tools: one for microenterprises, and one for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Eight interviews were removed during data cleaning, resulting in 208 interviews valid for data analysis: 84 with microenterprises, 82 with small enterprises, and 42 with medium enterprises.

Analysis

Data analysis involved several steps to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings:

1. After data collection, a thorough cleaning process was conducted to prepare the dataset for analysis. Out of the 87 surveys completed with microenterprises, 84 were of sufficient data quality for analysis.

¹³ Enumerators were unable to identify female entrepreneurs in the construction, engineering, and contracting sector and the light industry and manufacturing sector, likely due to gender norms.

2. Responses such as capital range and enterprise establishment range were categorized to enable comparisons across different groups.
3. Quantitative analysis was conducted to calculate relevant measures (such as means, frequencies, and proportions), to identify patterns and trends.
4. In addition to quantitative data, qualitative insights were derived from the open-ended gender-related responses, and respondents' comments during interviews.
5. The results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the labour market landscape in Dana City.

Challenges and Limitations

1. Purposive sampling was used due to the absence of a reliable, complete list of enterprises in the area. While efforts were made to balance data collection resources between sectors and activities, not all the activities included in each key employment sector were covered equally, due to purposive sampling and data collection constraints.
2. Purposive sampling for this assessment relied on the professional network of NGOs having previous and ongoing livelihood activities in Dana City, as this enabled the inclusion of home-based businesses. However, the use of NGOs' networks meant that microenterprises that have received support are likely to be overrepresented. Nonetheless, less than 10% of interviewed entrepreneurs (nine out of 84) reported that they had received support from not-for-profit organizations.
3. Snowball sampling for this assessment relied on the professional network of interviewees from the purposive sampling. During the data collection stage, enumerators may have been referred to enterprises similar to the ones they interviewed, thus skewing the findings. To mitigate this limitation, enumerators requested that respondents point them to other microenterprises where the respondent does not necessarily know the enterprise but knows the enterprise's activities.
4. All findings in this report are based on self-reporting. Due to inherent biases in self-reporting, there may be underreporting or overreporting of certain indicators, especially sensitive indicators, such as those relating to the reporting of financial trends and registration with relevant governmental entities.
5. During the data collection timeframe, 14-16 January 2025, there was a major strike¹⁴ in Dana City and surrounding urban areas by shop owners, companies, and commercial activities. The strike was in response to an increase in tariffs and customs taxes on imported goods imported through Bab El-Hawa border crossing with Türkiye, which led to an increase in prices in the markets of Idleb and Aleppo governorates by a percentage ranging between 15-20%. During data collection, enumerators could not reach some of the respondents they had planned to meet. However, they were able to complete the target number of surveys.

¹⁴ ETANA Syria, [Syria Update #14](#), 17 January 2025.

FINDINGS

Entrepreneurs' profile

This section of the assessment takes an in-depth look at the entrepreneurs' profile in Dana City through a gender lens, focusing on male and female entrepreneurs' socioeconomic status, household status, demographic status, education, previous experience and training, motivations and support-received to establish the enterprise, and needs to continue operating successfully.

Demographic profile

Most interviewed entrepreneurs are in their 30s (32% or 27 out of 84) or 40s (26% or 22 out of 84), are married (88%), and do not have any other sources of income than the enterprise (89%).

Household composition

Most interviewed entrepreneurs (62% or 52 out of 84) are the heads of their households; 30% (25 out of 48) are the spouses of the head of household.

Most interviewed entrepreneurs (62% or 52 out of 84) belong to a medium-sized household (four to six members), while one-third, 33% (28 out of 84) belong to a large household (more than six members). Entrepreneurs' household size is, therefore, roughly consistent with the median household size in Dana sub-district (six). The majority of entrepreneurs (92%) interviewed have household members under 18 years old.

Education

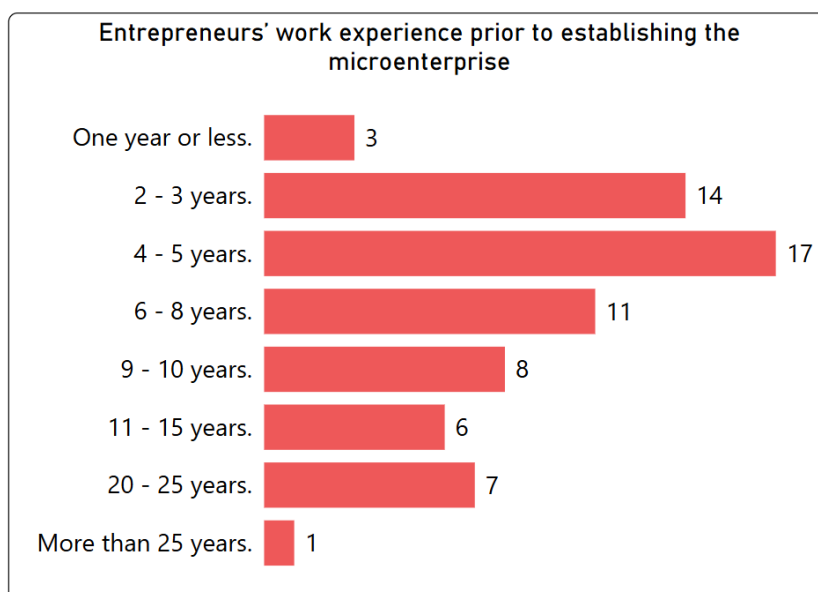
Most interviewed entrepreneurs (60% or 51 out of 84) have a school degree (1st to 12th grade) as their highest educational qualification, while 19% (16 out of 84) have a bachelor's degree (four years of study). 10% (8 out of 84) of interviewed entrepreneurs didn't participate in a formal education system but can read and write.

The private health sector has the highest proportion of educated entrepreneurs, with nine holding a bachelor's degree, one holding a Diploma (two-years study), and one holding a Master's degree.

Prior work experience

Among the interviewed entrepreneurs, 76% (64 out of 84) had previous work experience in the same sector before establishing their micro enterprise. In contrast, 24% (20 out of 84) either had no prior work experience or had experience in a different sector. Of the 20 individuals who reported not receiving any support for establishing their enterprises, 16 were female entrepreneurs. This indicates that this specific segment of entrepreneurs - those without prior experience and who have not received any support - requires more assistance/support and training than others to continue operating their businesses.

Out of the 64 interviewed entrepreneurs with previous work experience in the same sector, there was a considerable range in the number of years of experience as demonstrated in the graph below.

Figure 2: Entrepreneurs' work experience prior to establishing the microenterprise

Most interviewed entrepreneurs (82% or 69 out of 84) did not receive any type of training related to their enterprise's activities prior to establishing the microenterprise. Of the 15 entrepreneurs that did receive training, 11 are female entrepreneurs in the private health sector (received training related to medicine and pharmacy and practice pharmacy-related activities) and the services and maintenance sector (received training on makeup and hairstyling, and practice beauty salon activities).

Comparing male and female entrepreneurs

The most notable differences between male and female entrepreneurs are:

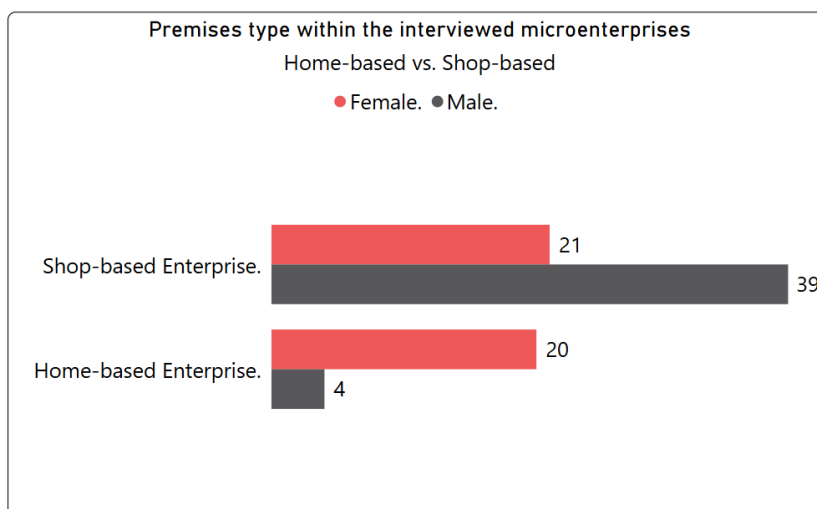
- The largest age group of interviewed female entrepreneurs are in their mid-thirties to mid-forties (35-45), while the largest age group of interviewed male entrepreneurs are in their early thirties (31-35) or early forties (41-45).
- The proportion of interviewed female entrepreneurs holding a bachelor's degree (27% or 11 out of 41) is higher than that of interviewed male entrepreneurs (12% or five out of 43).
- Only two of 43 interviewed male entrepreneurs have other income source than the microenterprise, while six out of 41 interviewed female entrepreneurs had other income sources (permanent or temporary jobs).
- All 43 interviewed male entrepreneurs are the head of household, and the proportion of interviewed female entrepreneurs that are heads of their household (22% or 9 out of 41) is considerably higher than the Dana sub-district average (14%).¹⁵

Most interviewed entrepreneurs (36 out of 41 female entrepreneurs and 41 out of 43 male entrepreneurs) reported having household members under 18 years old. This suggests that most entrepreneurs (92% or 77 out of 84) carry additional financial responsibilities. Given gender norms, female entrepreneurs often have additional childcare duties, especially when they are the head of the household, which is the case for nine female entrepreneurs.

¹⁵ REACH Syria. Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA). 2024 (unpublished).

However, the seven entrepreneurs that do not have members under 18 in their household were reportedly still only able to cover 20% to 80% of their household’s financial needs. Around half of interviewed female entrepreneurs (49% or 20 out of 41) operated a home-based microenterprise, while the other half (51% or 21 out of 41) operated a shop-based microenterprise. In contrast, only four out of 43 interviewed male entrepreneurs operated a home-based enterprise, while the other 39 operate shop-based enterprises.

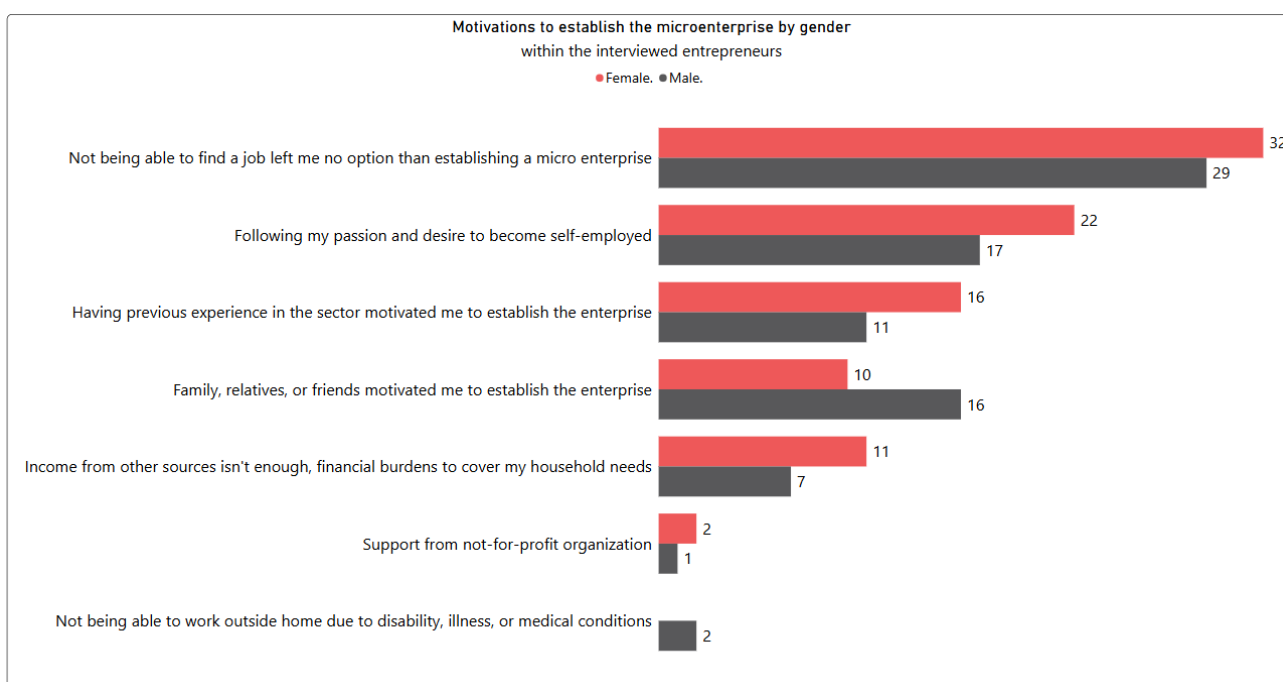
Figure 3: Home-based and shop-based enterprises by gender



Motivations for establishing the microenterprise

Most interviewed entrepreneurs (73% or 61 out of 84) reported that one of their main motivations for establishing the microenterprise was not being able to secure a job due to a lack of opportunities on the market. However, necessity was not the only motivator:

Figure 4: Motivations to establish the microenterprise by gender



While the stated top two motivations for interviewed male and female entrepreneurs were the same (inability to find a job and following their passion), male entrepreneurs were more likely to state that family, relatives, or friends motivated them, whereas female entrepreneurs were more likely to state that ‘previous experience in the sector’ and ‘financial burdens to cover their household’s needs’ motivated them to establish the enterprise.

Entrepreneurs that reportedly followed their passion (39) were slightly less likely than entrepreneurs with other motivations to have recouped their capital and started to make a profit (62% or 24 out of 39, compared to 75% or 63 out of 84 entrepreneurs that were able to recoup the capital and make profit).

Support from not-for-profit organizations did not appear to be a major motivator, as it was cited by only 4% or three out of 84 entrepreneurs (two female entrepreneurs and one male entrepreneur, each in a different sector), despite 11% (nine out of 84) reportedly having received support from a non-profit.

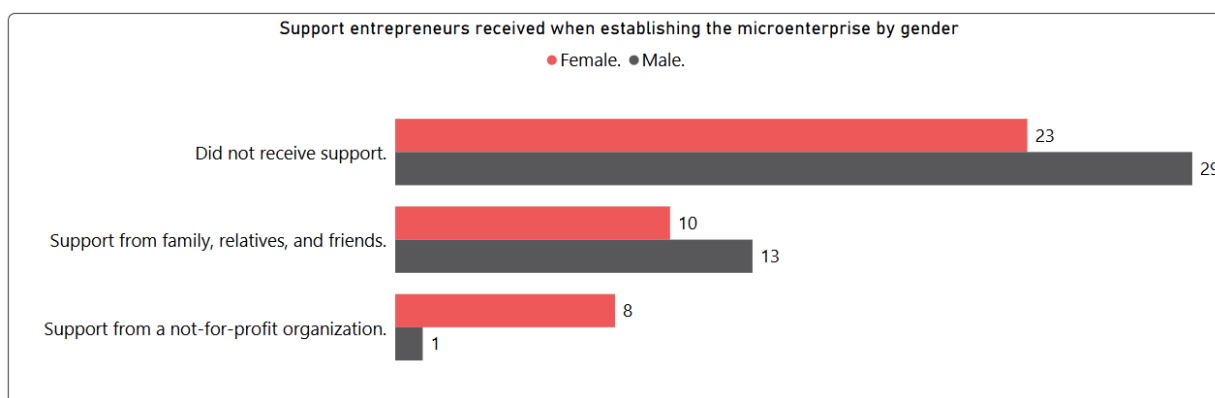
Support Received for Establishment

Although most entrepreneurs (62% or 52 out of 84) reported they did not receive any type of support and established the microenterprise themselves, around one in four (27% or 23 out of 84) entrepreneurs reportedly received support from their family, relatives, or friends and 11% (nine out of 84) entrepreneurs reportedly received support from a not-for-profit organization (a local or international NGO, municipality, Community Based Organization (CBO), etc.).

Most female entrepreneurs (53% or 23 out of 43) reported not receiving any support for establishing the microenterprise, while most females who received support received it as cash (15) or in-kind (three). Only four female entrepreneurs reported receiving support from family, relatives or friends, or from a not-for-profit organization.

The only major difference between the support that female and male entrepreneurs received was that a higher proportion of women received support from a not-for-profit (eight of the nine were female entrepreneurs), reflecting the considerable livelihoods programming occurring in Dana City. Other than that, there was no major difference regarding the support provided to male and female entrepreneurs, with 18 female and 14 male entrepreneurs reporting receiving one or more types of support.

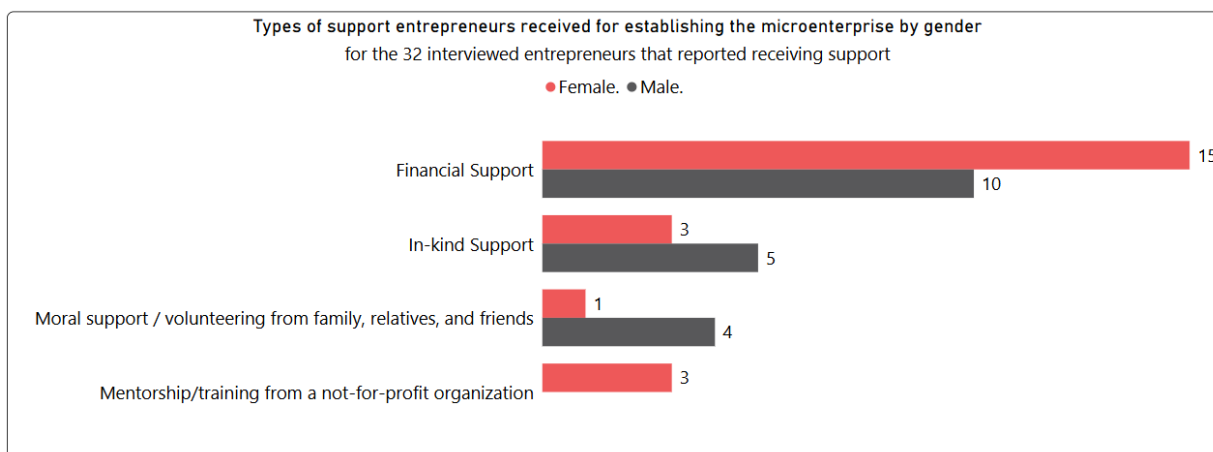
Figure 5: Support received when establishing the microenterprise by gender



There did not appear to be a strong connection between whether an entrepreneur had received support when establishing the enterprise and whether they had recouped the capital and were making a profit:

- Of the 52 entrepreneurs that reported not having received any type of support, 73% (38 entrepreneurs) were able to recoup the capital and start to make profit, 25% (13 entrepreneurs) were not able to recoup the capital, and one entrepreneur had recouped the capital but had not started to make a profit.
- Of the 32 entrepreneurs that reportedly received support, either from their family, relatives, or friends, or from a not-for-profit organization, 78% (25 entrepreneurs) were able to recoup the capital back and start to make profit, and 22% (seven entrepreneurs) were not.

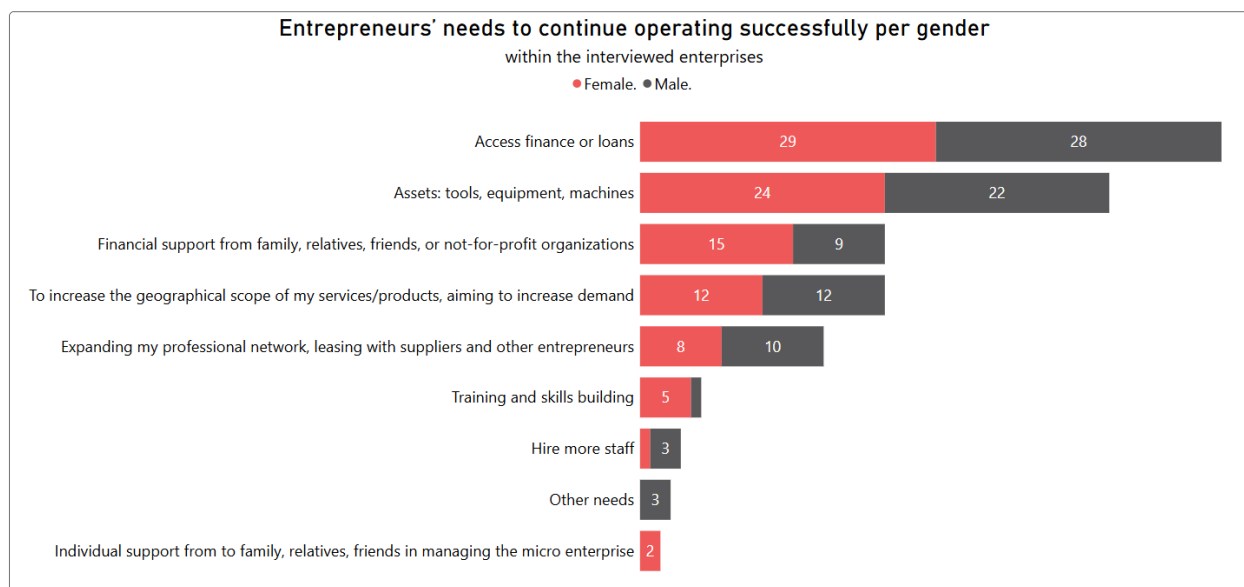
Figure 6: Types of support entrepreneurs received for establishing the enterprise by gender



Entrepreneurs' needs to continue operating successfully

When asking entrepreneurs about their needs to continue operating their microenterprise successfully, the most reported need was 'access to finance and loans' (57) followed by 'access to assets (tools, equipment, machines)' (46), then 'financial support' and 'increasing the geographical scope of the services and/or products they provide' (24 each) at the third place.

Figure 7: Entrepreneurs' needs to continue operating successfully by gender



Enterprise Profile

As per the definition, microenterprises have 1-3 paid staff, including the entrepreneur himself/herself who owns the enterprise and captures the profits. The following section explains the main characteristics of enterprises in Dana City.

Number of staff

Most interviewed enterprises consisted of three staff: two paid staff (the entrepreneur himself/herself and one paid staff member) and one unpaid staff member (volunteer, family member, or friend).

While the overall number of staff working for microenterprises (2-3) was consistent between those established by male and female entrepreneurs, **female-established enterprises tended to include two female and one male staff, while male-established enterprises tended not to include female staff at all:**

- Enterprises established by male entrepreneurs had an average of 2.28 male staff, and an average of 0.07 female staff.
- Enterprises established by female entrepreneurs had an average of 0.59 male staff, and an average of 1.51 female staff.

This suggests that support for female entrepreneurs could have knock-on effects for increasing female employment more broadly.

Microenterprise dates of establishment

Most interviewed enterprises (79% or 67 out of 84) were established less than ten years ago. Around half of interviewed enterprises (52% or 44 out of 84) were established between 2016 and 2020, and 27% (23 out of 84) were established between 2021 and 2024. The KIs interviewed during the scoping reported that the population of Dana City and surrounding areas has been growing since 2014 due to the displacement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from other areas across Syria. The above suggests that the overall number of microenterprises has also been increasing in that time, in order to meet the needs of the increasing population across all sectors, and/or because competition for jobs has caused more people to start enterprises.

Home-based and shop-based microenterprises

Overall, 29% or 24 out of 84 interviewed microenterprises were home-based, while the remaining 71% or 60 out of 84 enterprises were shop-based. Out of those 24 home-based microenterprises, 20 were owned by a female entrepreneur. This is likely due to the nature of activities that can be home-based and operated by female entrepreneurs, such as sewing, tailoring, and/or dry clean services, beauty and hairstyling services, food production activities, and livestock farming activities.

Property ownership status

Around two-thirds of microenterprises interviewed, 69% or 58 out of 84, operated in rented premises. This was especially prevalent in the private health sector, in which 10 out of 11 interviewed microenterprises reported renting their premises. In contrast, eight out of 12 interviewed microenterprises under the agribusiness sector reported that they own their farmland.

Capital needed to establish the microenterprise

The capital amount needed to establish a micro-enterprise varied across sectors:

- **Services and maintenance:** This sector had the lowest average start-up capital, with ten out of 12 enterprises having needed a capital less than 2,000 USD.
- **Private health:** Start-up costs were reportedly the highest in this sector. Most enterprises (eight out of 11) required 5,001–10,000 USD, while two out of 11 required 10,001–20,000 USD.
- **Agribusiness:** Start-up costs were relatively low, as seven out of 12 microenterprises required 1,000–3,000 USD to start operations.
- **Food production:** Start-up capital was fairly low. Most microenterprises (eight out of 12) needed 500–2,000 USD, three needed 2,001–5,000 USD, and only one microenterprise needed more than 10,000.
- **Construction, engineering, and contracting:** Six out of 10 microenterprises needed 1,000–5,000 USD. Only two enterprises across all interviewed microenterprises needed a capital of more than 20,000 USD, both under the construction, engineering, and contracting sector, working as a contracting company and an engineering office.
- **Light industry and manufacturing:** Start-up capital varied widely. Seven out of 13 needed 500–3,000 USD, while six out of 13 required 3,001–10,000 USD.
- **Commercial retail and trade:** Start-up capital varied greatly, as six out of 14 microenterprises needed 500–2,000 USD, four needed 2,001–5,000 USD, two needed 5,001–10,000 USD, and two needed 10,001–20,000 USD.

Additionally, **home-based** enterprises had relatively low start-up capital: around half (13 out of 24) needed a capital less than 1,000 USD, nine needed 1,001–3,000 USD, and only two required 3,001–5,000 USD.

Enterprise registration with relevant governmental entities

Around two-thirds (65% or 55 out of 84) of enterprises reported that they are not registered with the relevant governmental bodies. The private health sector has the highest proportion of registered enterprises (ten out of 11).

If registration is a form of risk aversion, the high rate of registration among enterprises in the private health sector may be linked to the high start-up cost and/or tighter regulation of this sector. The sector with the next highest registration rate was the contracting, engineering and construction sector, with six out of 10.

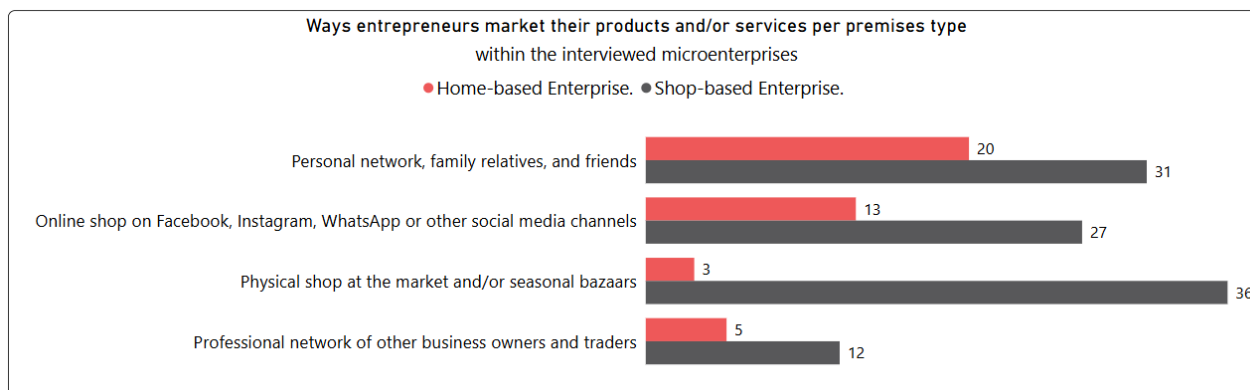
This result is expected as enterprises within the private health sector need to be registered in order to practice their activities, such as clinics and medical laboratories. Otherwise, legal repercussions (like in the case of a medical error) may apply. For enterprises within the construction, engineering, and contracting sector, they must be officially registered in order to apply for governmental and non-governmental procurements.

In contrast, the agribusiness sector and the food production sector have the lowest number of registered enterprises, with only two registered enterprises out of 12 in each sector.

Marketing approaches utilized by microenterprises

Microenterprises utilize different approaches to market their products and/or services, depending on their activities, capital, and whether they are home-based or shop-based.

Figure 8: Ways entrepreneurs market their products and/or services per premises type



Generally, home-based enterprises rely more on their personal network (family, relatives, and friends) to market their products and/or services, in addition to online marketing channels.

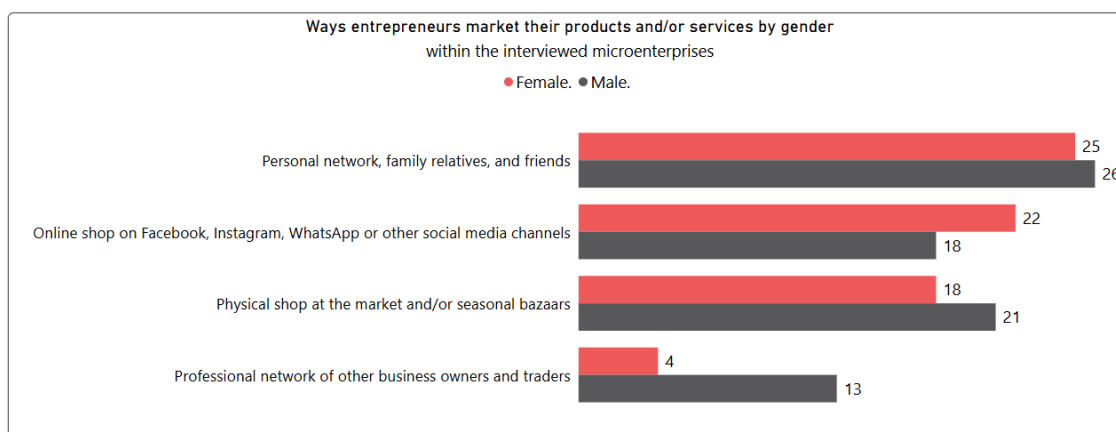
In contrast, shop-based enterprises appear to utilize a wider range of marketing approaches. The private health sector exclusively relies on the physical shop for marketing, while all other sectors assessed use more than one marketing approach.

Social media channels and applications were reportedly used by around half of home-based (13 out of 24) and shop-based (27 out of 60) enterprises utilize social media channels and applications.

While most home-based (20 out of 24) enterprises mainly relied on their personal network of family, relatives, and friends, around half of shop-based enterprises (31 out of 60) reported that they do.

Overall, utilizing entrepreneurs’ professional network of business owners and traders was the least reported marketing approach, used by 12 male entrepreneurs and only five female entrepreneurs. The greater use of it among male entrepreneurs may suggest that they have a wider professional network than female entrepreneurs. Thus, relevant stakeholders (such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Dana Municipality, and local NGOs) have the chance to support microenterprises expanding their professional networks by arranging networking events and sector working groups.

Figure 9: Ways entrepreneurs market their products and/or services by gender

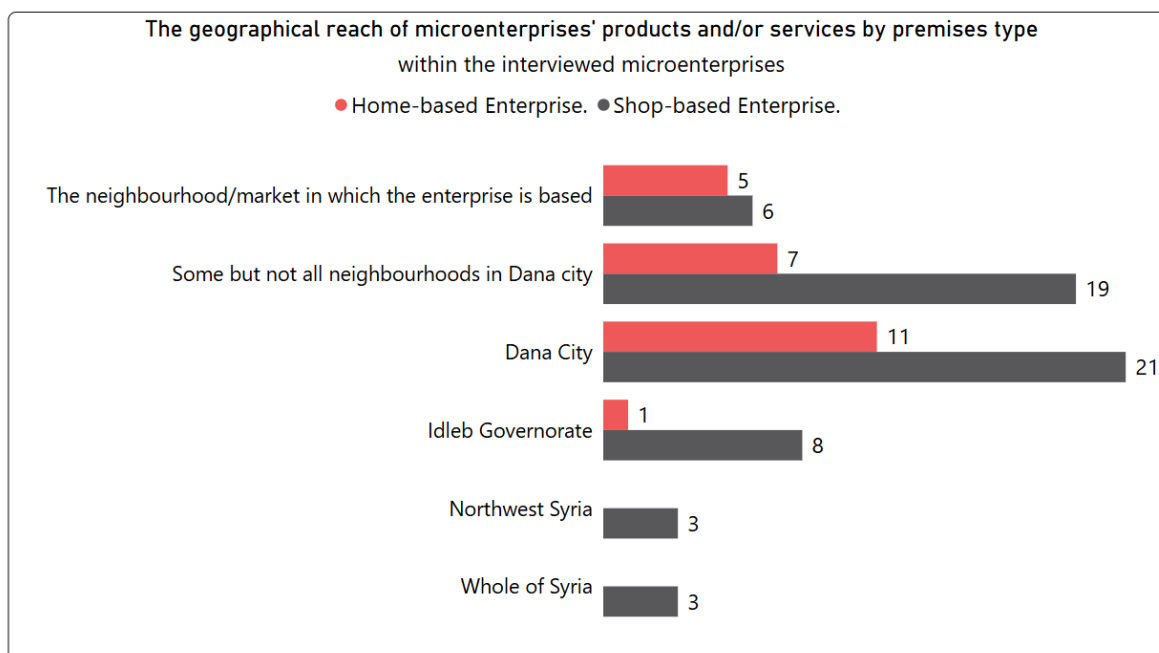


Geographical reach of microenterprises' products and/or services

Enterprises' geographic reach varied, with the largest portions able to deliver their products and/or services to all of Dana City (38% or 32 out of 84) or some but not all neighborhoods in Dana City (31% or 26 out of 84). Of the latter, most (18 out of 24) are home-based microenterprises.

The private health sector and the construction, engineering, and contracting sector have the widest reach among all sectors, serving Northwest Syria and the whole of Syria. In contrast, most microenterprises in other sectors operated only in Idleb governorate.

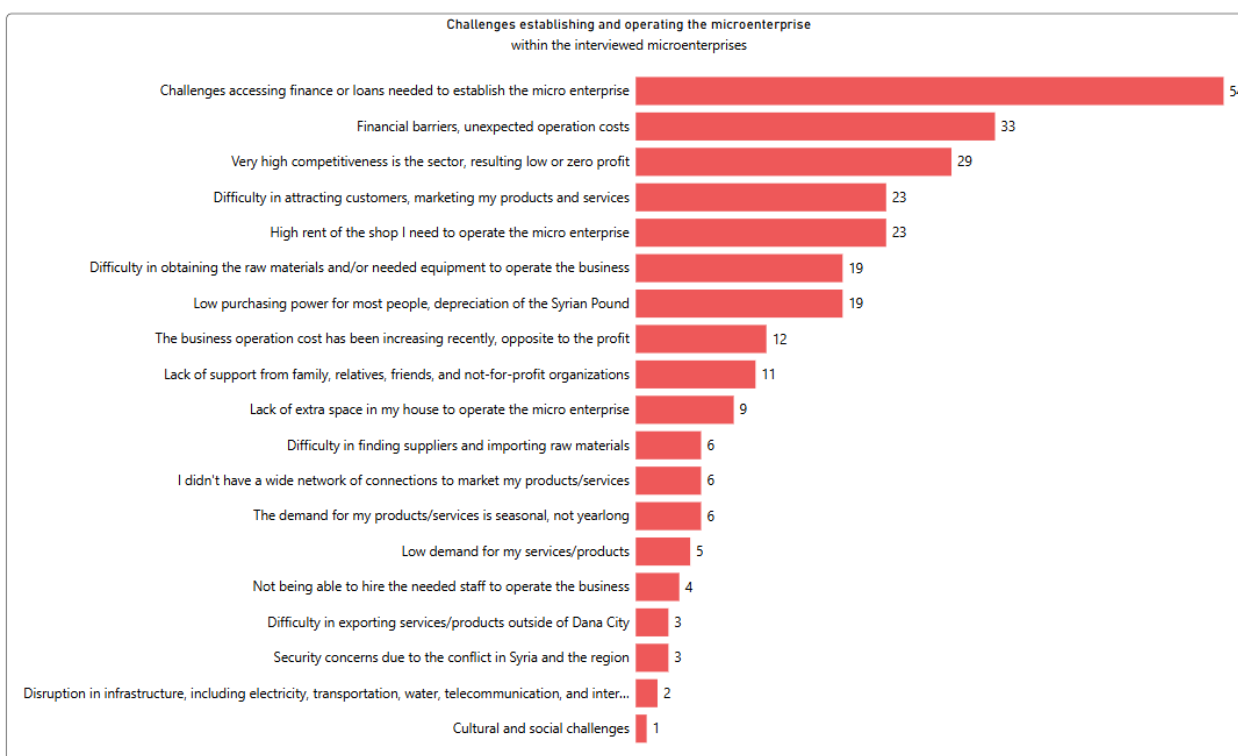
Figure 10: Geographical reach of microenterprise products and/or services by gender



Challenges faced while establishing and operating the microenterprise

- **Access to capital** was the most common challenge, reported by 64% (54 out of 84) of enterprises, particularly in the light industry and manufacturing sector (12 out of 13). Entrepreneurs reportedly struggled to secure start-up capital and loans.
- **Financial barriers and unexpected operation costs** affected around 40% (33 out of 84) of interviewed microenterprises. Of the nine entrepreneurs that reported receiving support from a not-for-profit organization, five reported this challenge.
- **High competition in the sector leading to low or zero profit** was the third-most reported challenge (35% or 29 out of 84).
- **Difficulty in attracting customers** and **high shop rents** were the fourth most reported challenge (27% or 23 out of 84 enterprise each). This was mostly reported in the food production sector and the service and maintenance sector.
- Limited access to raw materials / equipment and low purchasing power due to depreciation of the Syrian Pound, are both the fifth most reported challenge (23% or 19 out of 84 enterprise each).

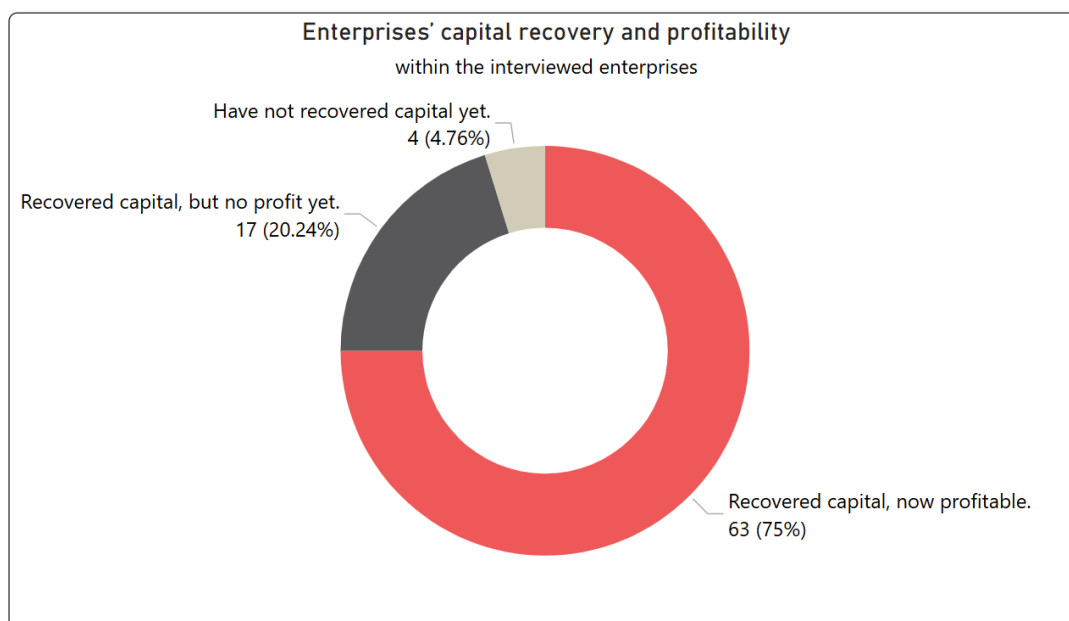
Figure 11: Challenges establishing and operating the microenterprise



Financial feasibility of the microenterprise

Despite the challenges entrepreneurs had faced since establishing the microenterprise, 75% (63 out of 84) reported the enterprise is financially feasible and they were able to recapture the capital they invested and started to make profit afterwards.

Figure 12: Microenterprises' capital recovery and profitability



However, 20% (17 out of 84) reported that, at the time of data collection, they had not recaptured the capital they invested. Of these:

- Ten are male entrepreneurs and seven are female entrepreneurs, suggesting that there is not a major difference between the genders.
- Most (15 out of 17) are shop-based enterprises in which the shop is rented, not owned. As renting a shop is a recurring cost, it makes sense that most enterprises with rented shops reported that they had not managed to recapture their initial investment. In contrast, 25 out of 26 enterprises in which the premises is owned reported that they had recaptured their initial investment.
- Enterprises established after 2021 were overrepresented (eight out of 23) among the enterprises that have not recaptured their initial investment. In contrast, seven out of 44 enterprises established between 2016 and 2020 reportedly had not recaptured their initial investment. This difference may reflect that it can take many years to recapture profit, and/or survivorship bias (i.e. older enterprises that had struggled to recapture their initial investment had closed down by the time of data collection).
- Nine had a relatively high start-up capital of more than 5,001 USD, of which six operated under the private health sector.

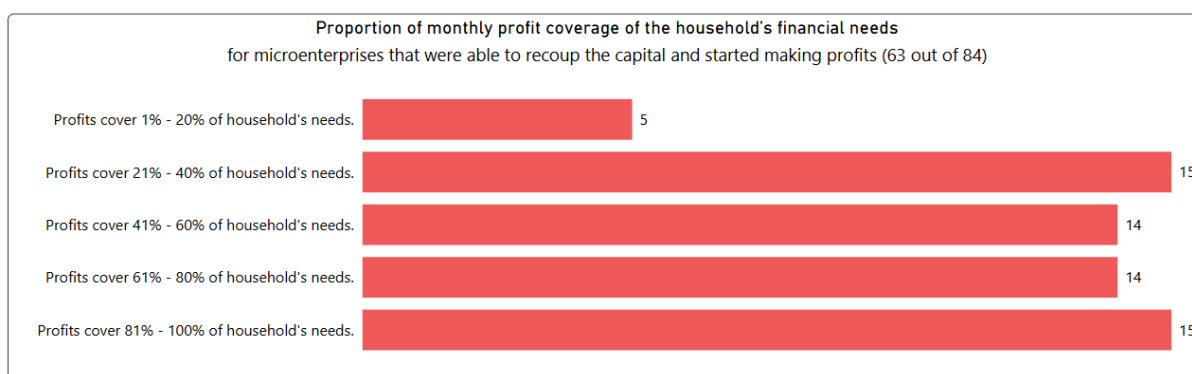
Only four enterprises reported they recaptured the capital they invested but have not started making any profits yet.

Ability of microenterprise monthly profits to cover the household’s financial needs:

Out of the 63 enterprises that were able to get the capital back and start to make profits, 44% (19 out of 43) male entrepreneurs reported that monthly profits covered 60–100% of their household’s financial needs, only 24% (ten out of 41) female entrepreneurs reported the same, highlighting the impact of the additional challenges female entrepreneurs faced.

Most microenterprises within the light industry and manufacturing sector (seven out of 13) reported that their monthly profits cover more than 60% of their household’s financial needs, indicating greater financial feasibility than other sectors.

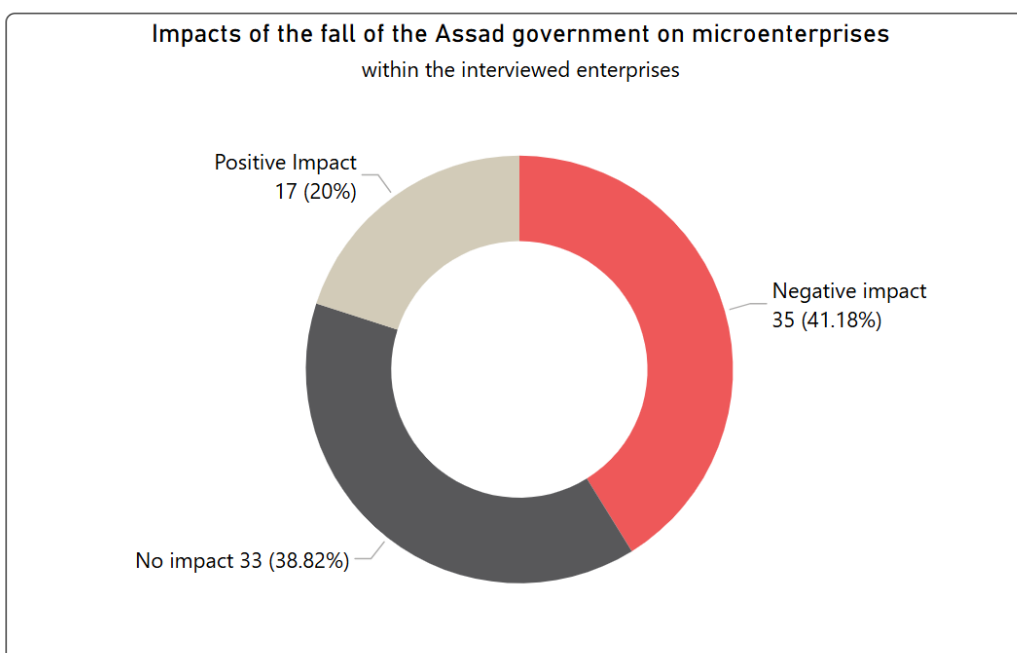
Figure 13: Extent of monthly profit coverage of the entrepreneur’s household’s financial needs



Impacts of the fall of the Assad government

As data collection took place around one month after the fall of the Assad government, respondents were asked about the impact of the developments on their enterprise. Responses were mixed:

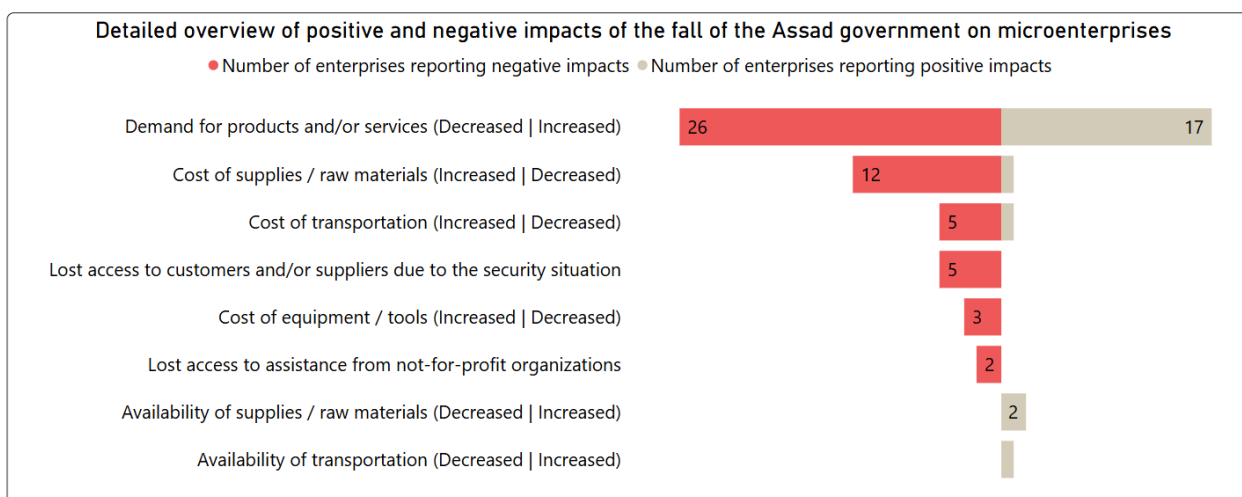
Figure 14: Impacts of the fall of the Assad government on microenterprises



Among the 35 microenterprises that were reportedly negatively impacted:

- Decreased demand was most reported (25 out of 35), as customers' consumption decreased.
- Increased cost of supplies and raw materials (12) was the next-most reported negative impact.
- Lost access to customers and/or suppliers due to the security situation (5).

Figure 15: Detailed overview of positive and negative impacts of the fall of the Assad government on microenterprises

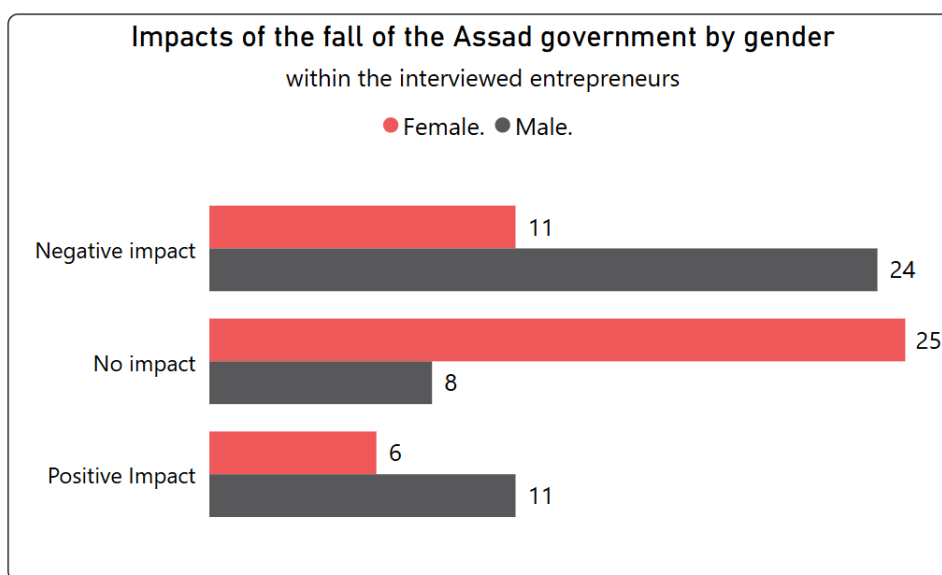


In contrast, 17 enterprises reported that they had experienced increased demand for their products and/or services with the influx of new arrivals.

Impacts varied by sector: commercial retail and trade microenterprises were more positively impacted, while light industry and trade, agribusiness, and construction, engineering, and contracting microenterprises were particularly negatively impacted.

The impacts were felt differently between male and female entrepreneurs; 56% (24 out of 43) of male entrepreneurs reported being negatively impacted by the fall of the Assad government while 61% (25 out of 41) of female entrepreneurs reported no impact.

Figure 16: Impacts of the Assad government fall on microenterprises by gender



Entrepreneurs’ plans for 2025

With the fall of the Assad regime, new opportunities for return to one’s area of origin arose. While the respondents’ displacement status was not part of the survey, around 70% of the Dana City and Sarmada City populations (151,691 out of 216,791 respectively) are IDPs.¹⁶ Some proportion of the respondents, therefore, are likely to be IDPs. When asked about their concrete plans to stay in the city/area or move in the next 12 months, most respondents (73% or 61 out of 84) stated that they plan to stay.

However, 12 entrepreneurs (14%) reported that they plan to move back to their place of origin in the foreseeable future, of the 12:

- Nine male entrepreneurs and three female entrepreneurs,
- Ten rented shop-based enterprises, one rented home-based enterprise, and one owned home-based enterprise),

The capital for those ranged from less than 1,000 USD to more than 20,000 USD, suggesting that this is not a major factor in decision-making.

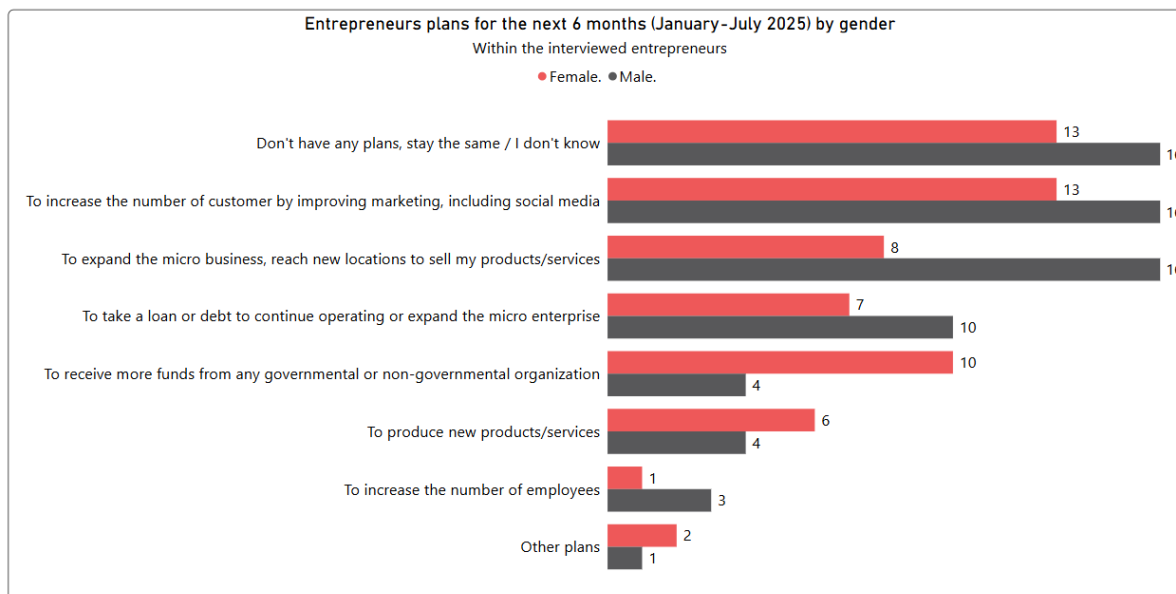
Forecasting their midterm future:

- The most common responses (each 29 out of 84 enterprises) were ‘do not have any plans for the next six months’, and ‘increase the number of customers by improving marketing, including social media’.

¹⁶ OCHA, Population Task Force Population Data, June 2024 (unpublished).

- Just 29% of interviewed enterprises (24 out of 84) reported that they plan to expand the microenterprise and/or reach new locations to sell their products and/or services.
- Despite reported challenges of securing financing, 20% (17 out of 84) of interviewed enterprises reported that they plan to take a loan or debt to continue operating or expand.
- Lastly, 14 out of 84 enterprises reported that they plan to pursue receiving more funds from any governmental or non-governmental organization. Ten of the 14 are enterprises owned by a female entrepreneur.

Figure 17: Entrepreneurs’ plans for the next six months (January - July 2025) by gender



Gender-specific challenges

In order to ensure the Dana Labour Market Assessment’s findings and insights were gender-sensitive, REACH sought to have an even gender balance for both interviewees and enumerators, and partnered with Basmeh & Zeitooneh, a grassroots organization that provides services in various sectors, and through its 12 community centers offers comprehensive support for displaced persons, refugees, and host communities in Syria, Lebanon, and Türkiye. The Gender and Protection team contributed to designing the data collection tool for small enterprises by formulating gender-related questions and indicators, then analyzing them to ensure that recommendations are based on an accurate understanding of women's conditions and realities in the labor market in the region.

Additional challenges female entrepreneurs face due to gender stereotypes

Most interviewed female entrepreneurs (85% or 35 out of 41) reported that they have not encountered any additional challenges due to gender stereotypes in their community, or any situation where they felt treated unfairly. However, six female entrepreneurs reported encountering the following challenges related to the stereotypes in their community:

- Widows face additional challenges as they are unable to move freely, which limits their ability to gain access to needed raw materials and liaise with suppliers.

- Difficulty balancing between being a housewife and carrying out day-to-day responsibilities of the microenterprise.
- Security concerns, such as fear of thefts. Female entrepreneurs expressed that robbers look at women as an “easier target”.
- Suppliers raise the prices of goods to take advantage of women entrepreneurs’ limited mobility and smaller professional network.
- Landlords prefer not to rent their premises to women, and, if they consent, the rent is higher than male tenants’ and is subject to frequent increases.
- In some cases, female entrepreneurs are told to stay home and take care of their household, as some activities (under the agribusiness sector, for example) are considered unsuitable for women.

Balancing between household responsibilities and operating the microenterprise

Around two-thirds of female entrepreneurs, 66% or 27 out of 41, reported being able to balance being a housewife and the day-to-day responsibilities of the microenterprise. However, the remaining third reported that they found it difficult to balance. The latter was especially the case for households with school-age children (12 out of 14 female entrepreneurs) as housewives do not have enough time for childcare responsibilities, including helping their children with homework. Also, running a shop-based enterprise was seen as more difficult than running a home-based enterprise due to the commute. This may have contributed to the greater proportion of female entrepreneurs who work from home. Some female entrepreneurs reported having to continue their microenterprise work at home after working hours, at the expense of their family time.

Difference in the customers’ behavior when dealing with a female entrepreneur

Customers reportedly do not treat female entrepreneurs any differently or, if they do, they support the microenterprise more: most female entrepreneurs (56% or 23 out of 41) reported not having noticed any difference in the customers’ behavior due to the fact that the entrepreneur is a woman. In contrast, 13 female entrepreneurs reported that customers support the microenterprise because the entrepreneur is a woman, especially if she was known to be the head of household, the only household member with an income source, a widow, or from a low-income household.

Some female entrepreneurs reported receiving feedback that some customers believe that there is a competition between male and female entrepreneurs working at the same activities, like dairy production and clothes tailoring, and that the quality of products and/or services provided by enterprises operated by female entrepreneurs are higher than the ones operated by male entrepreneurs.

Sector and activities in which women are allowed and able to work

Around half of female entrepreneurs (56% or 23 out of 41) stated that women do not face barriers in establishing and working in any microenterprise they prefer. In contrast, 14 female entrepreneurs stated that women are only allowed to work in the following sectors and activities:

- Education: teacher.
- Health: nurse, doctor, pharmacist, etc.

- Food production: sweets production, dairy production, etc.
- Home-based crafts like soup making and handicrafts.
- Desk jobs that do not require physical effort, like a secretary.
- Tailoring and sewing, hairdressing, cleaning, women's clothing, and accessories.

Female entrepreneurs suggested the following solutions to help their microenterprises thrive

- **Financial Support:** The majority of the female entrepreneurs, 38 in total, emphasized the critical need for financial assistance to help their microenterprises succeed. This includes access to loans and small grants to aid in establishing and expanding their businesses. Additionally, they noted the importance of logistical and in-kind support to further bolster their microenterprise operations.
- **Targeted Training Programs:** A significant number of the female entrepreneurs, 12 in total, recommended the implementation of tailored training programs. These programs should be designed to specifically address the unique needs and challenges faced in their respective sectors and business activities. This specialized training would provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively grow and manage their microenterprises.
- **Moral Support:** A smaller group of five female entrepreneurs also highlighted the value of moral support from their families and local communities. This type of encouragement and backing can be instrumental to help them overcome the gender stereotypes they may encounter while pursuing their entrepreneurial endeavors.

Overall, the female entrepreneurs provided a comprehensive set of solutions to help their microenterprises thrive. These recommendations demonstrate the multifaceted approach needed to empower and enable female-led microenterprises to reach their full potential.

CONCLUSION

As the recovery efforts continue after the fall of the Assad government, access to livelihoods is one of the biggest challenges facing host community and IDPs across NWS, especially for women and female-headed households. With NGOs trying to adapt their capacity building and TVET programming to the new political situation, the Dana Labour Market Assessment serves as a foundation for more evidence-based, relevant, and effective livelihoods programming in Dana City and elsewhere in Syria.

Findings of the assessment indicate that entrepreneurs were largely driven to establish their microenterprises by the lack of job opportunities in the market. The majority of interviewed entrepreneurs had prior work experience in the same sector before establishing their microenterprises, indicating a level of knowledge and expertise. However, training programs and sector-specific workshops have the potential to elevate the standards of microenterprises, covering essential business skills, financial literacy, and management strategies.

Per the scoping interviews, micro-enterprises in Dana City predominantly operate in seven sectors (agribusiness, commercial retail and trade, construction, food production, education, and construction, engineering, and contracting) with varying levels of staff composition based on the gender of the entrepreneur. Marketing strategies often rely on personal networks, online and physical shops, and professional connections, with a significant portion of enterprises not being registered with governmental bodies.

Challenges faced by entrepreneurs included limited access to financial resources, financial barriers, unexpected operational costs, and high sector competition leading to low profits. Female entrepreneurs encountered additional obstacles such as gender stereotypes, societal expectations, and exploitation by suppliers. Despite challenges, most entrepreneurs reported their enterprises as financially feasible and that they were able to recoup the capital invested. The main self-reported needs included access to finance, assets, and expansion of the geographical scope of their enterprises.

Microfinance programs specifically tailored for microenterprises are needed to provide accessible loans and financial support, in addition to grant programs aimed at supporting female entrepreneurs and home-based enterprises to help entrepreneurs collecting the necessary capital to start and expand their enterprises. Access to networking initiatives that connect entrepreneurs of all experience levels with each other could facilitate partnerships and expansion.

The impact of the Assad government's fall varied among entrepreneurs, with a majority planning to remain in Dana City in the foreseeable future.

In summary, the findings highlight the complex dynamics of the micro-enterprise ecosystem in Dana city. There appears to be scope for livelihoods programming to enhance the viability and growth of microenterprises in Dana City, contributing to economic development and improved livelihoods for entrepreneurs, particularly women.